

YOUTH MOVING INTO ADULTHOOD WITH 4-H RITE OF PASSAGE

King County 4-H facilitated the first 4-H Rite of Passage (ROP) program for youth this year. Participants were from the Metro King County YouthBuild Program. This program is a national drop-out retrieval program, designed to promote positive life skills, workforce preparation, and specifically, construction skills leading to a guaranteed job at the end of a successful year in the program. The youth participants were ages 17-19. The group of six was evenly divided between males and females. These youth had experienced many family and school challenges,



some were former drug and alcohol abusers, some were parents, some were living on the street. All were committed to achieving success in their life, but none was fully convinced of the value of ROP at the time of our first meeting. Recruiting youth was a challenge. Students wondered why they would want to go without the comforts of home? Why they would choose to fast for 3 days? In order to interest them, the Youthbuild staff members who had participated in their own Rite of Passage last August, shared their stories. Little by little, over several weeks, a few youth came forward and expressed interest in learning more.

A life-changing event...

During our wilderness stay, youth continued to work on setting their intentions. Most of them focused on moving to adulthood. But, as their time to solo drew closer, predictable fears took over and the participants decided in the end that it was too big a risk for them to sleep alone in the wilderness. Instead, we agreed to come home early. Even so, the student reflections made it clear that this experience will change their lives for the better. One student described her experience this way: "The wind. You never know what it will throw." Another student carved an arrow. The arrow was tipped with red like the fire of his passion for success in life. It had stripes of color representing his family and friends. The curve of the arrow represented to him that his life had not been a straight path and would probably take unpredictable turns.

Other 4-H Rites of Passage activities this year included two orientation workshops. One was held for adult leaders at the Washington State 4-H Leadership Forum in Ocean Shores and a second workshop for youth held at the state youth leadership summit. Seventeen youth participated in the two-hour session. They learned about the history and purpose of 4-H Rites of Passage and participated in a "power walk" designed to promote personal goal setting and decision making.



WSU Food Sense Educator Jackie Cramer records her personal 4-H Rite of Passage in her journal. *Photo S. Lerner*

At the training for adult guides, held in August, eight new leaders were trained. Participant reflections on their experiences included:

"It has had a profound effect on me, which is always with me. It enabled me to connect with the unity that I find by dwelling in nature that can get lost in the human-made world." (Youth Worker)

"Offers a structured opportunity to experience a personal awareness of the divine." (Minister)

"I went to the ROP with a simple intention in mind, and came out a week later with a whole new perspective on life"

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